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ABSTRACT

Once a community college foundation is well established, an alumni program can be developed, although the focus should be on making contacts and gaining supporters rather than raising funds. The following steps can help establish a successful alumni program: (1) conduct a feasibility study on campus; (2) form a committee to establish program missions and goals; (3) hire or assign a director of development to gain visibility both on campus and in the community; (4) form a nominating committee to select an alumni board composed of influential graduates; (5) develop an accurate mailing list of graduates' names and addresses; (6) initiate a comprehensive review of the current office computer system and suggest ways to improve alumni lists, communication, membership solicitation, and recognition; (7) after sufficient alumni names are entered into the database, undertake an initial mailing with an address correction to check the validity of the list; (8) as a first activity, organize a reunion of Associated Student Body presidents; and (9) establish an Alumni Hall of Fame. To implement these initiatives, college support is critical, including a capable office staff who understand the importance of the Alumni Office, a promotions budget of at least $500, access to and support from the college president, and an adequate computer system to identify alumni. (HAA)

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NETWORK OF CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOUNDATIONS

FOUNDATION DEVELOPMENT Abstracts

STARTING A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY COLLEGE ALUMNI PROGRAM

Virginia Baxter

If your Foundation is well established, it's time to think about inaugurating an alumni program. Community college alumni can play an active role of service. Their common, positive experiences and the opportunity to repay the institution encourage involvement through volunteerism. Alumni usually provide the first level of giving in the gift-giving pyramid. However, even though they may serve as a source for donations, from the very beginning the alumni association *should be expected to raise friends rather than funds!*

First Steps

The initial steps to establish a successful alumni program and, for that matter, any successful development program are these:

STEP 1: Conduct a feasibility study on campus. This process should include personal, individual interviews with each Foundation board member, the college president, college board members, key faculty and staff (i.e., Faculty Associations and Classified and Academic Senate presidents, the Associated Student Body president, the public information officer, key alumni, and other leader community and campus members). Some of the questions asked at hypothetical Worthwhile College could be: what is your impression of *Worthwhile?*, why are you affiliated with *the College?*, have you attended classes at *Worthwhile?*, how do you see the role of an alumni association? what do you see as the role of the alumni director?

The rationale for this approach is to hear from those with a personal history of *Worthwhile College* what they believe are the essentials for the alumni program to be successful and what they believe should be the goals and direction of the development office.

- *STEP 2*: Any successful organization needs a plan before it can achieve its goals. If a mission statement and stated goals for the alumni program have not been compiled, a committee should be formed to establish them.
- *STEP 3*: Visibility both on campus and in the community is essential to explaining the strengths and importance of *Worthwhile College* and the Alumni Office. At Long Beach City College I am a member of several campus and community organizations. The role of director of development should be to represent the college in the community.
- *STEP 4*: A nominating committee should be formed to select an alumni board composed of influential votes from the various decades. The board should provide input and assistance at functions. The alumni director should ensure that every board volunteer has a responsibility and that they each know what is expected. Once must guard against volunteers who are great at "telling" the office what to do but have no desire in working to improve the program.
- *STEP 5*: Because most community colleges have not kept up-to-date names and addresses of their graduates, research is essential in finding former students. To achieve some kind of accurate mailing list, I recommend:
  - Finding out what is available on campus in the form of lists of former graduates, i.e., vocational programs such as nursing, athletic teams with which coaches may have stayed in contact, former student leaders, particularly student body presidents, and club rosters.
  - Placing a flyer in every employee mail box asking them to provide the names and addresses of family members, neighbors, former students or friends who attended your institution.

- Sending to every foundation board member that same flyer asking them to provide the names and addresses of family members, neighbors, former students, or friends who attended your institution.
- Calling media attention to the formation of an alumni office and setting up interviews with the press asking readers to send in names of alums.
- Rounding up volunteers, especially older ones, to assist in tracking down alums. In my office a different volunteer is responsible for each day of the week. People love to look through old year books and call friends for additional names and addresses.

• *STEP 6:* A comprehensive review of the current office computer system and suggestions on how to improve lists of alumni, communication, membership solicitation and recognition should be initiated.

• *STEP 7:* After sufficient alumni names are entered into the computer, an initial mailing could be sent with an address correction to check the validity of the list.

• *STEP 8:* If you are looking for an excellent first activity, why not organize an Associated Student Body president's reunion. Access to their names and addresses would probably be fairly easy, and they possibly may have continued their leadership roles in the *Worthwhile College* community after graduation. This could be an excellent event to kick off the opening of the Alumni Office.

• *STEP 9:* Many institutions have established an Alumni Hall of Fame at which distinguished graduates are recognized for their achievements in the community and in their field of endeavor.

College Support Required

In order to implement these recommendations for starting an alumni program, the following support from the college is necessary:

- An office staff which understands the importance of the Alumni Office, both on campus and in the community. Good public relations and attention to detail from the staff are essential for success.
- An office staff which is capable of functioning even though there may be a great deal of activity in the office. The number of support staff and budget necessary is contingent on college expectations (i.e., How are memberships and donations processed? Who is responsible for acknowledging these donations, newsletter production, telephone coverage? What kind of campus support is available? What is the computer capability?).
- A promotions budget of at least $500 which would be used to take key alums to lunch, send flowers, cards, etc.
- Access to and support from the college president when there are those who question alumni expenditures in times of dwindling resources.
- Develop a computer-based system to identify alums, not only by name and address, but by area of interest or involvement.

Ultimately, one should expect the alumni program to get grads back on campus by providing events at which they can participate and be involved, whether it be reunions, Homecoming, etc. Depending on staff support, ideally, a biannual newsletter would commence and after a year a membership drive with a set goal of perhaps 200 members would be appropriate. The membership dues should be low ($10-25), but the purpose for this is to ascertain commitment and support.

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